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*Gender in Pain*

*Gender and Class in Elisabeth Gaskell's The Life of Charlotte Brontë*

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## 1. Introduction

Three Brontë sisters from a small North England village, Haworth, magnetically attracted numerous biographers and literary critics who felt compelled to retell and reinterpret their life stories. The first biography about one of the Brontë sisters came into being three years after its subject's death in 1857. *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, written by Charlotte Brontë's friend Elisabeth Gaskell, stands out as a formative Victorian biographical work. Its historical importance is derived from the fact that *The Life* is a first full-length biography of a female novelist to be written by a sister novelist. Moreover, it is a detailed account of Brontë's private and professional achievements. Using primarily Brontë's letters and private notes Elisabeth Gaskell reconstructs the path of a shy, talented girl who went above the expectations of her surroundings and inscribed her name in the history of English literature. The biography's description of social and gender context of the Victorian period is what makes this biographical piece even more historically relevant. That is, by thematizing Brontë's dilemmas, struggles and literary ambitions, the biography also thematizes working and life conditions of middle-class women writers in the Victorian England. Brontë's social and gender barriers could be extended to depict a position of one whole generation of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century women writers. Through the figure of Charlotte Brontë Elisabeth Gaskell revises the standards of merit in literature to finally define a new female literary ideal.

The following paper aims at illustrating two mutually intertwined aspects of Charlotte Brontë's literary path. More specifically, the paper looks at specific gender as well as class markers which determined the author's personal and professional development. The discussion opens with a summary of the most relevant topics in *The Life*'s two volumes. In the analysis which follows, a special attention is given to the relationship between the biographer, Elisabeth Gaskell, and her subject, Charlotte Brontë. It is discussed to what

extent Brontë's figure functions as a projection of Gaskell's gender and class dilemmas. Also, this paper looks at the didactic aspects of *The Life*, which helped to establish Brontë as an exemplary woman writer of the Victorian era. The further text focuses on answering the question, what it meant to be a woman writer in a culture whose definitions of literary authority were utterly patriarchal. Based on the examples from the biography, the paper tries to explain the position of Victorian middle-class women in the process of literary production. Subsequently, it investigates the formation of the stereotype of female inferiority on the literary market. Topics such as repressed sexuality, exaggerated domesticity, romanticised presentation of pain and illness are being examined and put in relation to the social and gender context of the Victorian England. Against this backdrop, this thesis tries to formulate what features women should have possessed to assert themselves as respectable female authors. Finally, it will be explained under what circumstances Charlotte Brontë's image as a highly talented female author and exemplary Victorian woman was created.

## **2. Overview of Important Topics**

*The Life of Charlotte Brontë* is undeniably a valuable source of biographical information on its subject's life. However, it is also a mediated and conditioned presentation of a female literary cult. The biography illustrates the coming-of-age of Charlotte Brontë as well as her sisters' and explains how the great Brontë literary talent came into being. As the story progresses cultural, class and gender norms of Victorian society come to the fore, as well as details about Charlotte Brontë's upbringing, the author's private agonies and class and gender doubts.

Structurally, the biography is divided in two volumes with their respective core topics. In her essay *Triangulation, Desire, and Discontent in The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, Linda

Peterson describes the thematic division of the biography: “In volume 1, Gaskell concentrates on the quiet regular duties of the daughter, the wife, or the mother as she presents her subject; in volume two, she turns to the responsibilities of the gifted writer who, possessing such talents, must not hide her gift in a napkin but labour for the use and service of others” (914).

The biography opens with a detailed depiction of the mentality of a small North England community where the protagonist spends the majority of her life. Gaskell concentrates on the presentation of the isolated Yorkshire landscape, eccentricity of local manners of the Yorkshire men and Brontë's home affairs. The reader is informed about the very intellectual and religious atmosphere Charlotte Brontë and her sisters were growing up in. More, the reader learns about the modest social and financial context Brontë sisters had been brought up in. The first volume also deals with the presentation of personality and physical appearance of Brontë sisters and their deep attachment to each other, their home and their father. Here, the biographer presents a rather unpleasant boarding school experience of the sisters and connects this trauma with an early death of the delicate and fragile Brontë girls, Maria and Elisabeth. In the early chapters Charlotte Brontë's extreme sense of duty, responsibility towards her family and hardworking mentality come to the fore. These traits are accompanied by unattractive physique, industrious character and self-sacrificing mentality of the protagonist. Brontë's dutiful, obedient, highly intellectual, excessively modest character is placed at the centre of the biography. As Gaskell formulates it, the strong feeling of duty lies at the foundation of Charlotte Brontë's character and is paramount to the feeling of pleasure (124). Gender and female responsibilities in the Victorian society foreground the formation of Charlotte Brontë and become more and more conspicuous as her story goes on. Gender issue is present in Brontë's frustration with professional options offered to women, in her enormous self-restraint and submissiveness, in her and her sister's physical fragility, in the

relationship between the father and the sisters, in accepted self-indulgent and overtly arrogant behaviour of the brother Branwell Brontë. Moreover, gender frustration springs out of Brontë's depressive moments, melancholic disposition and forced solitude.

The second volume presents Charlotte Brontë as a mature female author who has just ventured out on the literary market and has been trying to establish herself in a male-dominated world of work. The protagonist's weak health, attachment to home and obsession with her household duties remain prominent topics in the second volume. However, the reader's attention is now steered to Brontë's literary production. Numerous references, reviews and letters help the reader to understand the difficulties not only Charlotte Brontë but also her sisters experienced when entering the literary market. These difficulties are primarily linked to the social prejudice and stigma of female inferiority. Aware of the double-bind of femininity in the world of work Charlotte Brontë, like many women of the Victorian period, decided to publish under a male pseudonym. However, it did not take long before her real identity was disclosed and the author landed in the midst of the public attention confronted both with admiration and sharp critique. Further, *The Life* presents and analyses the psychological process Charlotte Brontë went through after dropping the mask of Currer Bell, her male pseudonym, and presented herself as a middle-class clergy daughter in the elitist and patriarchal Victorian literary circles. On her way to the professional success, struck by severe losses of her dear family members, tragic death of her brother and depressive loneliness, Gaskell's Charlotte Brontë never changed her modest, conscientious and self-sacrificing nature. It is precisely these virtues, as this paper will show, that shaped Brontë into a heroic lady writer of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

### 3. Subjectivity in Biographical Writing

As mentioned above, *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* is a historically relevant and, in large part, historically accurate documentation of the life stages of one of the most important Victorian literary personas; however, it is also a piece of literary fiction. The biography as a literary genre is shaped by various expectations from various parties involved. It is a genre which contains elements of fiction as well as autobiographical moments. Moreover, biography is also shaped by the specific social context in which both the biographer and his or her subject lived. That is, the biographer as a creator of the text inevitably influences the presentation of the observed subject. This chapter tries to show that, for the production of biography, the biographer's thoughts and experiences are as relevant as the subject's. Furthermore, the following text looks at what factors went into the composing of *The Life* and what influence these factors exerted on the depiction of the life of Charlotte Brontë. It critically re-examines the driving forces and motivation behind the production of Elisabeth Gaskell's *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*.

When writing a biography, the biographer is influenced by different, often opposing external and internal factors. Firstly, biographers face a challenge of delivering accurate, coherent stories about their subject while conforming to various expectations coming from readers, commissioners, publishers and the subject's family. Secondly, in the process of writing, biographers often project their own experience and thoughts in the biography. Elisabeth Gaskell's *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* is influenced by both external and internal factors. Although Gaskell keeps within the world of facts and written documents on Brontë's work and life, she does use literary tools of selection and revision. Gaskell based her biography primarily on letters Brontë wrote to her friends, the other authors she corresponded with and publishers. However, in arranging the letters and excerpts from Brontë's diaries, the

biographer created a specific narrative which, in order to be published, had to oblige to expectations of Brontë's private circles as well as to expectations of a demanding Victorian audience. Moreover, *The Life*, the biography of one of the most prominent Victorian women writers, had generated certain stylistic and didactic demands which had to be met. Gaskell had to appease the conflicting demands of Charlotte Brontë's father Patrick Brontë, who commissioned the book, the husband Arthur Bell Nicholls, her friend Ellen Nussey, who put all Brontë's letters at Gaskell's disposal and finally, Constantin Heger, the author's alleged lover. The role of the biographer, in this case, was to present facts from Brontë's life, in the way that they correspond to the demands of the subject's family and friends circle, codes of decorum of Victorian literature and the biographer's own ambition to produce an accurate, interesting and coherent literary work.

In his research of literary biographies Allen Hibbard states, it is expected from the biographer to present chronologically the pertinent facts from his or her subject's life and to provide appropriate interpretations and comments. These accumulations of facts and interpretations are meant to display the fullness of the personality, account for creative production for which the subject is known, and help the audience understand what the subject's guiding moral and literary principles were (19). Throughout the process of writing a biography, the relationship between the subject and its biographer becomes very tight and complex. The biographer takes up the roles of the subject's advocate and critic. The colouring of the events of the subject's life is inevitably influenced by the biographer's experience, world view, literary style and ambition.



It could be argued that Gaskell fulfilled the task of chronicling and arranging the experience of her younger colleague in *The Life*. However, *The Life* also had to meet the stylistic and didactic aspirations of the biographer. Elisabeth Gaskell was guided by the ambition to defend Brontë from accusations of improper literature and to establish a female literary role model. In this posthumous biography, Gaskell tries to set Brontë free from the accusations of immorality, profanity and brutality which were allotted to her novels. In her article *The Brontë Biographies: Romance, Reality and Revision*, Katherine Frank argues that Mrs. Gaskell's writing was from the start confined by her didactic vision of her subject (142). This didactic vision, as this paper will demonstrate, had an impact on the composition and selectiveness of certain gender and class topics in the biography. Moreover, the well-trained novelistic style of Elisabeth Gaskell and the author's novelistic instincts undeniably penetrated this biographical work and influenced the way in which Gaskell portrayed Charlotte Brontë. When a novelist attempts a biography there is a realistic possibility that the genre boundaries will be crossed and that the biography will occasionally swerve into the field of literary fiction. As Hibbard highlights, "the novelist who attempts biography must come to grips with the impulse to invent, to shake loose the constraints of facts and documentation" (29). That is, the novelists who decide to write a biography must relinquish their novelistic writing style as well as their instinct of fictitious representation of reality. According to Virginia Woolf, who intensively studied the role and responsibility of the biographer, the biographer-novelist must constantly be cautious of the temptation "to use the novelist's art of arrangement, suggestion, dramatic effect to expand the private life" (Woolf, "The New Biography" 234). The novelist's personal literary touch cannot be disregarded when it comes to analysing *The Life*.

Elisabeth Gaskell did not completely succeed in separating her personal stylistic and topic preferences from biographical precision. Katherine Frank comments on the lack of objectivity and writer's distance stating that *The Life* is characterized by "inevitable flaws of subjectivity, inaccuracy and suppression"(144) . Frank credits Gaskell for exhaustive research on Brontë's life. However, Frank also notices the presence of Gaskell's dramatic style, capability of psychological exaggeration and novelistic sympathy in the biography. Charlotte Brontë left the impression of being a heroine of Gaskell's novel, a fictional character such as Mary Barton, Margaret Hale or Moly Gibson: "Like these heroines, Charlotte is portrayed as a paragon of brave endurance, moral integrity and superhuman self-denial. This heroic vision is accurate in many respects, but Mrs. Gaskell neglected Charlotte's less noble qualities - her passion, anger and barely repressed rebelliousness against her lot" (Frank 143). Deirdre D'Albertis points out that „from a late twentieth century perspective, it is clear that Gaskell's 'defence' of Brontë's life did more than any other single text to create a myth of martyred feminine creativity that continues to dominate our vision of the lonely woman artist as a heroic genius set apart by aesthetic integrity, intellectual detachment and physical disease" (D' Albertis 2). The thoughts of Elisabeth Jay go in the similar direction. Jay states that this "first full-length biography of a female novelist written by a sister novelist, has created, almost single-handedly the myth of the Brontës" (Jay ix).

#### **4. Being a Woman Writer in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century**

The projection of biographer's own ideas and beliefs, identification with the subject's experiences and difficulties, and both admiration and critique, flow into the biography. Elisabeth Gaskell did not only present the gathered material, established the chronology and linked the parts of her subject's life into a coherent biography, Gaskell also presented a part of

herself when illustrating Charlotte Brontë's world. Many parallels can be drawn between Gaskell and Brontë; both were ambitious, creative women writers fighting for their place on the patriarchal literary market. *The Life* reflects not only its subject's self-development and crisis. It also gives the reader an insight into the biographer's personal doubts, Gaskell's self-definition and self-re-creation in the process of writing someone else's story. The following lines attempt to shed light on the autobiographical dimension of this biographical text. This autobiographical part refers primarily, as the further text will show, on the complexity of female authorship in the Victoria era. In her book *Biography: Fiction, Fact, and Form*, Ira Nadel states that Gaskell is using the form of biography to express and re-examine her "own goals and achievements through recounting those of her friend" (123). *The Life* concentrates on its subject's as well as on its producer's preoccupation with literature, on their struggles to overcome restrictive social conventions and reconcile two vocations, the first one of being a woman and the second of being an author. Topics such as the life-work balance, ascetic self-denial, proportion between feminine responsibilities and demands of writer's profession underpin the paths of both authors, Gaskell and Brontë. Furthermore, what concerns both authors, Gaskell and Brontë, is the anxiety of breaching the social and gender norms by producing a rather unconventional, female literature.

Elisabeth Gaskell's explicit comments and narrative interventions indicate her personal and emotional involvement in the affairs she describes. While describing Brontë's experiences, Gaskell is almost re-living them together with her subject. The following passage from the biography demonstrates the immediacy of the biographer's emotional involvement in the affairs of Brontë's life as well as the biographer's need to defend Brontë's literary and life decisions. After publishing *Jane Eyre*, Brontë received severe, gender-oriented assaults from a male literary reviewer, on which Gaskell comments:

Who is he that should say of an unknown woman: "She must be one who for some sufficient reason has long forfeited the society of her sex"? Is he one who has led a wild and struggling and isolated life,—seeing few but plain and outspoken Northerners, unskilled in the euphuisms which assist the polite world to skim over the mention of vice? Has he striven through long weeping years to find excuses for the lapse of an only brother; and through daily contact with a poor lost profligate, been compelled into a certain familiarity with the vices that his soul abhors? Has he, through trials, close following in dread march through his household, sweeping the hearthstone bare of life and love, still striven hard for strength to say, "It is the Lord! let Him do what seemeth to Him good" (Gaskell 282).

Charlotte Brontë's story triggers strong associations and emotions by the biographer, who is dealing with similar obstacles. By validating Brontë's decisions, her literary self-sufficiency and audacity, Gaskell tries to validate her own literary experience. She speaks for herself as much as for Brontë when she states that the life of a woman writer is a divided existence, with "two parallel currents" (Gaskell 259); the life as a woman and the life as an author. Throughout her biography Gaskell discusses this conflict between Victorian femininity and self-realisation; between home, duty and service others on the one side and ambition and desire on the other. Gaskell's solution to this issue is self-discipline, modesty and dutifulness which will lead to creative and literary development. The following passage from the biography illustrates precisely this conflict which underlies both *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* and the life of its author Elisabeth Gaskell:

When a man becomes an author, it is probably merely a change of employment to him.

He takes a portion of that time which has hitherto been devoted to some other study or

pursuit; he gives up something of the legal or medical profession, in which he has hitherto endeavoured to serve others, or relinquishes part of the trade or business by which he has been striving to gain a livelihood; and another merchant or lawyer, or doctor, steps into his vacant place, and probably does as well as he. But no other can take up the quiet, regular duties of the daughter, the wife, or the mother, as well as she whom God has appointed to fill that particular place: a woman's principal work in life is hardly left to her own choice; nor can she drop the domestic charges devolving on her as an individual, for the exercise of the most splendid talents that were ever bestowed. And yet she must not shrink from the extra responsibility implied by the very fact of her possessing such talents. She must not hide her gift in a napkin; it was meant for the use and service of others. In an humble and faithful spirit must she labour to do what is not impossible, or God would not have set her to do it (Gaskell 259).

The multiple layers of the gender and class issues, which foreground this biography, will be explained in the further course of this paper.

## **5. My Masculine Part, the Poet in Me**

The position of female authors on the literary scene was thematised in detail by Gilbert and Gubar in their influential book *The Madwoman in the Attic*. The authors try to provide the answer to the question: “What does it mean to be a woman writer in a culture whose fundamental definitions of literary authority are both overtly and covertly patriarchal” (40) ? This chapter takes up this topic and discusses it within the frame of Elisabeth Gaskell’s and Charlotte Brontë’s lives and literary activities. The focus of the following text is placed on explaining the social phenomena which led to the gender segregation in Victorian literature.

Moreover, this chapter investigates the cultural preconditions of the formation of the gender-stereotype.

Novels written by women were considered inferior to those written by men. When Victorians thought of female literature, they thought of “romantic fantasy and emotional self-dramatization”(80), claims Elaine Showalter. Showalter’s book, *A Literature of Their Own*, discusses the position of Victorian women writers who aspired to enter the literary market. According to Showalter, Victorian female authors were usually engaged in “lower” genres and wrote children’s books, letters or diaries primarily for female audience. Simple psychology and naïve religious optimism, sentiment, tact, observation, domestic expertise, high moral tone and knowledge of female characters were characteristic of the Victorian female literature. Accordingly, 19<sup>th</sup> century female writing was considered to be able to cover only topics linked to domestic issues. Showalter points out that literature written by women was perceived to lack originality, intellectual training, absent intelligence, humour, self-control and knowledge of male character. Intellectual superiority was assigned to male literature (90).

Furthermore, bad reputation followed women who attempted the pen. In her article, *A Room of One’s Own*, Virginia Woolf remarks that women who didn’t feel guilty for their literary ambitions and writings were considered to be mad and monstrous. Women writers often struggled with guilt for allowing themselves to cross their gender confinements and attempt higher forms of literature. Woolf comments on the precarious gender situation of women writers of the 19th century: “A woman might write letters while she was sitting by her father’s sick-bed. She could write them by the fire whilst the men talked without disturbing them” (Woolf, “A Room” 56). A decent woman could not, however, enter the literary market

by herself. Her literature was confined to her private sphere to serve her own emotional needs. It was perceived as her emotional outlet, not a product to be placed on the literary market. It was thought to be out of a “normal” woman’s reach to produce high quality, reflective literature: “One can measure the opposition that was in the air to a woman writing when one finds that even a woman with a great turn for writing has brought herself to believe that to write a book was to be ridiculous, even to show oneself distracted” (Woolf, “A Room” 56).

Showalter explains that inferior female position in literary production was connected to the firm belief that women were, when measured against man, physically and intellectually handicapped. Those deficiencies were thought to be conditioned by the less complex nerve system and lesser intellectual capabilities of women. Therefore, it was believed that women’s energy was meant to flow in less intellectual and more practical, domestic directions. However, when analysing gender stereotypes, one should bear in mind the limited educational and life experience of women in the 19th century. Due to the fact that they were excluded from the majority of important social and educational institutions, women were unable to acquire social, historical, political and business knowledge and establish themselves as competitive authors. Conversely, broad education as well as their activities in business, army, politics and industry made men competent social observers and commentators. As Showalter claims, precisely the lack of higher education, isolation and boredom with their domestic lives “had distorted women’s values and channelled their creative energy into romantic fantasy and emotional self-dramatisation” (80). Therefore, many women writers avoided serious literature and were active in production of highly emotionalized, trivial literature. However, with the improvement of their education and intensification of their social participation, women became more aware of their capabilities and contributions. Women writers worked hard to step out of the patriarchal literary conventions and self-confidently tried male-devised genres

and topics. Nonetheless, for the women of the mid-19th century, to start writing professionally meant to continuously protest against their own as well as the public voices of conscience:

Thus the loneliness of the female artist, her feelings of alienation from male predecessors coupled with her need for sisterly precursors and successors, her urgent sense of her need for a female audience together with her fear of the antagonism of male readers, her culturally conditioned timidity about self-dramatization, her dread of the patriarchal authority of art, her anxiety about the impropriety of female invention - all these phenomena of “inferiorization” mark the woman writer’s struggle for artistic self-definition and differentiate her efforts at self-creation from those of her male counterpart (Gilbert and Gubar 50).

It was a mixture of social and gender prejudice that shaped the evolution of female authorship. The 19<sup>th</sup> century women writers did not only have to fight against imposed male-biased social norms and laws. More importantly, they had to overcome their own anxiety of authorship, as formulated by Gilbert and Gubar in *The Madwoman in the Attic*. The term refers to the fear of female authors to produce a piece of fiction which is in its style and topics inappropriate for their gender. Gilbert and Gubar characterise the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> female authorship, as a struggle “in isolation that felt like illness, alienation that felt like madness, obscurity that felt like paralysis to overcome the anxiety of authorship that was endemic to their literary subculture” (51). Literature produced by the mid-19th century Victorian women writers, *The Life* being one such example, often reflects this type of anxiety. More precisely, it reflects inner identity struggle between the awareness of the absurdity of gender norms on the one side and patriarchal upbringing on the other. The mixture of anxiety and desire to step out



of the socially imposed zones and breach the patriarchal rules lies at the bottom of the creation of *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*.

As it is visible from Elisabeth Gaskell's biography, both authors, Gaskell and Brontë, frequently perceived their gender as "a painful obstacle, or even a debilitating inadequacy" (Gilbert and Gulbar 50). What is also visible from the previously quoted excerpts of the biography, is the strength and zeal to change the patriarchal thinking with respect to female literary production. In *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, Elisabeth Gaskell aspires to change the shared perception of female inadequacy and to emancipate women's literature. Her biography expresses women's claim to the poetic territory which was traditionally considered male. The biographer ventures out to claim that women are as capable as men when it comes to creating literature. Charlotte Brontë stands out in a very conservative literary scene as an author who dared to combine creativity, subversiveness, realism and femininity and abandon the old domestic style, so frequently imposed on women authors. "I determined to take Nature and Truth as my sole guides, and to follow in their very footprints; I restrained imagination, repressed excitement; over-bright colouring too, I avoided, and sought to produce something which should be soft, grave and true" (Gaskell 254). It is against this backdrop of softness, graveness and search for the truth of her identity, that Charlotte Brontë's battle against deeply rooted patriarchy takes place.

## **6. Victorian Labour Market for Middle-class Women**

As previously explained, Charlotte Brontë's professional path was limited by clearly defined gender and class clusters. In *The Victorian Girl and the Feminine Ideal*, Deborah

Gorham studied the possibilities open to middle-class women on the industrial Victorian labour market. Unlike the working class, Gorham concludes, middle-class women were not expected to engage in clothing or industrial sector; yet, they were expected to choose a wage-earning profession suitable to their class background. She highlights that the 19th century saw middle-class women primarily as providers of care, service or education, that is, as nurses or teachers. The industrialisation gave women the opportunity to broaden the scope of their job options; however, the reality showed that professional opportunities for female middle-class remained limited to conventional service-providing occupations. Despite the improvement in female education, as described in *The Life*, Brontë sisters remained reduced to domestic activities combined with lower positions in education, medicine or service industry. When discussing Brontë's career options, Elisabeth Gaskell states that "matrimony did not enter into the scheme of her life, but good, sound, earnest labour did (...) Teaching seemed to her at this time, as it does to most women at all times, the only way of earning an independent livelihood" (127). Charlotte Brontë and Elisabeth Gaskell were deeply aware of the reduced social and professional mobility of their gender. For a woman from Victorian middle-class clergy household, which Charlotte Brontë was, professional writing was not on the list of desirable activities. Accordingly, Robert Southey, one of authoritative figures of Victorian poetry, advised Charlotte Brontë to channel her energy into more respectable female occupations, accentuating that "literature cannot be the business of a woman's life, and it ought not to be. The more she is engaged in her proper duties, the less leisure she will have for it, even as an accomplishment and a recreation" (Gaskell 117).

Not only was their career choice limited. Their professional and social mobility was restricted as well. Katrina Honeyman's studied the role of gender in the Victorian industrial period. The author states: "Even when women worked alongside men, they were still

considered, by men and by employers, to be primarily domestic beings with a transitory relationship with the world of work” (52). Regardless of their social status and educational level, women remained simple employees with very low prospect of moving up the business ladder. Moreover, it was considered inappropriate for women to demonstrate professional ambition and place themselves in centre of public attention. Concerning this matter Deborah Gorham points out that “middle-class males were educated in a way that was designed to prepare them for a life of competition and achievement. For their sisters, achievement was not a central goal. A girl might become a learned lady, or a serious musician or painter, but if she pursued such endeavours, it was to be for her own private satisfaction” (24).

An especially complex market was the literary market. As the excerpt from Robert Southey’s letter to Charlotte Brontë shows, the literary market was dominated by deeply entrenched, patriarchal hierarchies, male-oriented discourse and gender prejudice. For many women the dream of literary career remained out of reach. Those who dared to tap into this market had to conform to the overall male-oriented norms and rules. Therefore, many women were very cautious and unsecure when attempting the pen. Elaine Showalter’s *The Literature of Their Own* offers a good insight into the mentality of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Victorian women writers:

“They worked hard to present their writing as an extension of their feminine role, an activity that did not detract from their womanhood, but in some sense augmented it. This generation would not have wanted an office or even “a room of one’s own”; it was essential that the writing can be carried out in the home and that it be only one of numerous tasks of the true woman” (85).

Dorothy Mermin asserts that Victorian “women were anxious to redefine their art as womanly service: selfless in intent, self-effacing in execution, enhancing rather than replacing womanly responsibility, and if possible attributable to the impetus of a man” (Mermin 18). With the ambition to meet the criteria of the conservative Victorian audience and with the personal motivation to establish Brontë as an exemplary female author, Gaskell highlights her subject’s creativity and leaves out less feminine sides of Brontë’s literary path. For example, the biographer takes little or no account of financial issues of Charlotte Brontë’s publications, minimizes the professional aspects of her career, and tries to present the author’s literary activities as being motivated exclusively by her creativity not by her ambition to position herself professionally and build her financial security. „In constructing a model of Brontë’s authorial self that emphasized literary inspiration and eschewed financial negotiations” (Peterson 915), Gaskell tries to convince Victorian public that middle-class women writers were not aspiring to overtake men in their business, but were just following their vocation. To justify and sooth the effects of Brontë’s audacious and rather masculine appearance on the literary market, Gaskell shifts the focus to Brontë’s more feminine, domesticated sides. In her private life, as the following chapter will show, Brontë compensates for the lack of “femininity” in her profession and goes beyond her means to re-establish the image of subservient Victorian womanhood.

## **7. Her Life as Charlotte Brontë and Her Life as Currer Bell**

Fiction writing being a viable male profession, many women authors indicated that they felt apologetic and very unsure about attempting the pen. “A professional literary woman in England was considered a somewhat shady lady, no doubt promiscuous, probably self-

indulgent and certainly indecent. (...) In consequence, she was gradually but inexorably excluded (even exorcized) not only from canon of serious literature but from the parlours and libraries of respectability” (Gilbert and Gubar 63). As it is visible from Elisabeth Gaskell’s biography, women writers were deeply aware of their inferior position on the literary market. They were constantly irritated by the fact that their individual accomplishment would be subsumed under an unfavourable group stereotype of trivial literature. “A woman novelist, unless she disguised herself with a male pseudonym, had to expect critics to focus on her femininity and rank her with the other women of the day, no matter how diverse their subjects or styles” (Showalter 73). In order to avoid their works be dismissed as lighthearted romances or trivial fiction, women authors deployed male pseudonyms. “Male identified woman writer felt that, dressed in the male costume of her pseudonym, she could walk more freely about the provinces of literature that were ordinarily forbidden to ladies” (Gilbert and Gubar 65). Further, Elaine Showalter highlights that the usage of pseudonyms enabled women to surpass the boundaries of their gender and experiment with untypical literary style and topics. Under the veil of a male name women could let their imagination loose and freely develop their fiction. Moreover, they could abandon the modest, domestic literature without being afraid of public deprecation (Showalter 74).

To avoid the double-bind of femininity in literary world and to circumvent sexually biased criticism, Charlotte Brontë decided to publish under a male pseudonym:

We veiled our names under those of Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell; the ambiguous choice being dictated by a sort of conscientious scruple at assuming Christian names positively masculine, while we did not like to declare ourselves women, because -- without at that time suspecting that our mode of writing and thinking was not what is called "feminine" -

- we had a vague impression that authoresses are liable to be looked on with prejudice  
(Gaskell 215).

Brontë was dismayed at the prospect of being reviewed according to collective standards applied to low-brow women's literature. "She especially disliked the lowering of the standard by which to judge a work of fiction, if it proceeded from a feminine pen; and praise mingled with pseudo-gallant allusions to her sex, mortified her far more than actual blame" (306), reports Elisabeth Gaskell.

The importance given to revealing the gender of the author of *Jane Eyre* signals the gravity of the pseudonym-issue among Victorian literary audience. In several instances Gaskell accounts for the attention paid to unveiling the identity of Currer Bell: "The whole reading-world of England was in a ferment to discover the unknown author. (...) Every little incident mentioned in the book was turned this way and that to answer, if possible the much vexed question of sex" (Gaskell 251). The realistic style, precise depiction of human passion and sexuality, unconventionality of expression and intellectual mastery made the audience believe that *Jane Eyre* was written by a man (Peterson 915). Once the gender of the author was discovered, Brontë was accused of providing an extremely vivid description of human sexuality and male characters, the phenomena which were supposed to be inaccessible to her as unmarried woman. The fact that coarseness, sexuality and rebelliousness against social norms came from a woman's pen shocked Victorian reviewers. What additionally irritated the audience was Charlotte Brontë's refusal to submit herself to her social destiny and adopt the socially prescribed inferiority. Once the gender of Currer Bell was revealed, Brontë bravely defended her work, demanding it to be judged on her literary performance, not on her gender. When it came to her literature, she rejected all imposed limitations, concepts of modest

femininity and bravely claimed her rights as a writer. Within this context, Charlotte Brontë declared herself as neither a man nor a woman, but an author:

I wish all reviewers believed 'Currer Bell' to be a man; they would be more just to him. You will, I know, keep measuring me by some standard of what you deem becoming to my sex; where I am not what you consider graceful, you will condemn me. All mouths will be open against that first chapter; and that first chapter is true as the Bible, nor is it exceptionable. Come what will, I cannot, when I write, think always of myself and of what is elegant and charming in femininity; it is not on those terms, or with such ideas, I ever took pen in hand: and if it is only on such terms my writing will be tolerated, I shall pass away from the public and trouble it no more. Out of obscurity I came, to obscurity I can easily return (Gaskell 305).

When it came to her work, Charlotte Brontë dared to challenge the pillars of Victorian society. She boldly stood up for her authorship rights, she tried new topics and literary styles, distanced herself from stereotypically trivial, female literature. Professionally, she declared herself as an author who searches to depict reality in its most authentic, “grave, soft and true” way (Gaskell 254). However, Charlotte Brontë never completely distanced herself from the patriarchal definition of Victorian femininity. As the further discussion will show, rebelliousness, emancipation and zeal of Currer Bell are continuously being challenged by the sense of duty, obedience and fragility of the private Charlotte Brontë.

## 8. Repression as Precondition for Literary Advancement

Although very detailed in its depiction of Charlotte Brontë's life, Elisabeth Gaskell's biography does not cover all aspects of its protagonist's life path. It is focused on illustrating the combination of hard-working, self-sacrificing and creative parts of Brontë's character. However, topics such as desire, sexuality or passion receive very little attention. The coming chapter focuses precisely on the presentation, or more precisely, on the lack of the presentation of sexuality, desire and self-restraint in the respective biography. It is observed how the concept of femininity had been split into two domains; domains marked by dutifulness and creativeness on the one side and sexuality and passion on the other. Furthermore, the chapter demonstrates how and why the latter domain of female sexuality was silenced and manipulated to serve the purpose of formation of the ideal Victorian woman writer.

One of the most important presuppositions, Gaskell's biography rests upon, is the mutual exclusiveness of literary production and female sexuality. More precisely, in *The Life*, Elisabeth Gaskell presents work, literature and domestic duty to be in opposition to emotional world and pursuit of sexuality. The subject of the biography emerges as an advocate of sexual and emotional repression. Here, Charlotte Brontë is portrayed as an author who relinquishes desire and passion to assert herself as a woman writer on the patriarchal Victorian literary market. "The narrative of Brontë's painful mastery of her passions(...)fits all too neatly into our commonplace scenario of nineteenth-century psychic life, with its supposed appeasement of social duty at the expense of emotional extension" (38) claims John Kucich. The author points out that Charlotte Brontë was so absorbed in the Victorian relations of power and social expectations that she willingly denied herself emotional autonomy and adapted to anti-individualistic, strongly gendered conditions of the Victorian repression. This extreme



repression in the private sphere is being compensated for in the literature. Literature establishes itself as a field of self-expression and emotional outlet. Kucich remarks that “Brontë seemed to have identified her fictional world as a locus of pure inward vitality and expansion, in opposition to the claustrophobic, lifeless world of everyday reality she regarded around her” (55). Her sexuality and vitality are being repressed and tamed to find its altered expression either in the literature or in moments of day-dreaming and lonesome walks. As Kucich formulates, it is the combative nature of Brontë’s sexual passion that helps to ensure this author’s emotional insularity (56) and enables her to focus on her own literary agenda.

Starting off from the fact that work and private sphere are mutually intertwined areas, Gaskell emphasizes the importance of rigorous balancing between the two. Personal fulfilment should be found either in work, more precisely in writing, or in the pursuit of domestic duties. The personal sphere should, therefore, be stripped off, as much as possible, of emotional, sexual and any other sort of indulgence. With respect to this matter Brontë states:

As to intense passion, I am convinced that that is no desirable feeling. In the first place it seldom or never meets with a requital; and in the second, if it did, the feeling would be only temporary: it would last the honeymoon and then it would give place to disgust. Certainly this would be the case on the man’s part; and on the woman’s - God help her, if she is left to love passionately and alone. I am tolerably well convinced that I should never marry at all (Gaskell 144).

Brontë claims repeatedly she has to endure and refrain to improve and progress (Gaskell 324). For the subject of this biography it is essential to achieve mental purity and concentration through self-restriction. This purity enables her to articulate her impressions and ideas and

present them in a coherent literary form. Brontë's extreme self-discipline, rejection of men, self-renunciation and unrelenting focus of her energy exclusively on her writing and domestic duty underpin this thesis.

As John Kucich explains, love and passion inevitably inform the language and style of a woman writer and make it fallible for inferior female topics, tropes and literary intrigues (53). Moreover, the experience of love and passion in private life of a women writer would make her literature pathetic, romantic, subjective and thereby, irrelevant on the literary market. Self-restraint enables a female author to develop literary creativity and preciseness of expression. By relinquishing sexuality, it is possible to retain a purified and precise literary voice which is not contracted with "minor" love dilemmas and typical feminine problems.

In *The Life* literature is presented as an exclusive source of passion and personal fulfilment for Charlotte Brontë and her sisters. As Nancy Armstrong argues, all the biographical evidence suggests that "from a remarkably early age they [the Brontë sisters] thought of personal fulfilment in terms of writing and consequently they prepared themselves to be novelists" (189). Inspiration and creativeness are experienced in the moments of self-restriction and deep concentration. The removal of sexuality and romance from her life allows Charlotte Brontë to experience emotions, longings and pain more genuinely and to translate their effects onto the paper. Finally, the ascetic lifestyle enabled Brontë to gain access to an entirely different body of knowledge. The author was not distracted by pleasures and yearnings and was able to concentrate on her studies of literature and writing. The following quote demonstrates the importance of the repression of passion in Brontë's life:

I have got to the point of considering that there is no more respectable character on this earth than an unmarried woman, who makes her own way through life quietly,

perseveringly, and who, having attained the age of forty-five or upwards, retains in her possession a well-regulated mind, a disposition to enjoy simple pleasures, and fortitude to support inevitable pains, sympathy with the sufferings of others, and willingness to relieve want as far as her means extend (Gaskell 220).

To position herself as an author, Brontë decoupled her feminine sensibility and desire from her writing. As the author herself stated, she “restrained imagination, eschewed romance, repressed excitement, over-bright colouring too” (Gaskell 254). When writing, she tried to remain ungendered, neither a man nor a woman. The author focused on eschewing her “femininity” which presupposed sensuality, sexuality and tendency to romance. Whereas Kucich perceives Brontë’s repression as a “sign of radical self-transcendence, an internal surrender to disruptive, self-destructive, expansive power” (70), Gaskell’s biography presents Brontë’s sexual repression as a necessary step to achieve the expansion of her personal and professional horizons, which are clearly defined by the social position of Brontë’s gender and class.

## **9. Domesticity in Victorian Culture**

In Victorian culture gender functions as an axis of difference both in the private and the work sphere. It is an axis which determines social, professional and sexual mobility. Deborah Gorham explains how “the private sphere of love, emotions and domesticity was defined as the sphere of women. The public sphere was, therefore, the male’s exclusive domain” (4). In her influential book on Victorian domestic fiction, Nancy Armstrong also concludes that the site of household and family life was hallowed as female, whereas men stood in the economy and political realm. “Masculine objects were understood in terms of their relative economic

and political qualities, while feminine objects were recognised by their relative emotional qualities” (Armstrong 15). Here, the concept of domesticity emerges as “the package of obligations (...) combined to restrict women’s freedom to engage in other social and economic activities” (Honeyman 103). Accordingly, middle-class women in Victorian society led a sedentary life and were confined to the indoor spaces. Men, on the other hand, were encouraged to position themselves “outdoors”, in business and the public spectrum. An ideal woman did not only have to, she was willing to be domesticated, dependent and submissive. As Gaskell puts it, “he is expected to act a part in life, to do, while they [women] are only to be” (138). Self-initiatively should a woman show clear preference for a domesticated life and reject any form of public attention. Her sexuality, as previously shown, was either repressed or practised within conventional, domesticated structures. Her body and her mind were meant to serve the formation and maintenance of a well-organised household. Household was female sphere of influence, female sphere of personal development.

As Gubar and Gilbert emphasize, Victorian women were trapped within the patriarchal architecture, of both their domestic areas as well as of social institutions. “Literary confined to the house, figuratively confined to a single place, enclosed in the parlours and encased in texts, imprisoned in kitchens and enshrined in stanzas” (Gilbert and Gubar 84), women authors found themselves plagued by their homes, the family relations, hometown landscape and homesickness.

A large portion of Elisabeth Gaskell’s biography is dedicated precisely to these topics. *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* dramatizes the enforced domestication, the emotional imprisonment within the patriarchal system as well women’s search for self-definition and self-establishment in a male-dominated world. As previously emphasized, within the private sphere Brontë embodies a self-sacrificing, gentle, home-orientated femininity: “I shall be

quite pass the prime time of my life, my faculties will be rusted, and my few acquirements in a great measure forgotten. These ideas sting me keenly sometimes; but, whenever I consult my conscience, it affirms that I am doing right in staying at home” (Gaskell 236). The oppressive aspects of Victorian domesticity are noticeable in the reports on Brontë’s depression, loneliness and repression of desire. Metaphorically, her domestic confinement is illustrated by the spatial isolation of Charlotte Brontë’s clergy household. Haworth, as a secluded, conservative, religious village, has a central place in Brontë’s personal and professional formation. The privacy and physical remoteness of the parsonage significantly impacted Brontë’s world-view and self-definition. As Gaskell describes it, “wild, strong hearts, and powerful minds, were hidden under an enforced propriety and regularity of demeanour and expression, just as their faces had been concealed by their father, under his stiff, unchanging mask” (59). It is the stiff, unchanging mask of the domesticity, embodied by the image of the small, secluded, almost claustrophobic village that steered the course of the life of Charlotte Brontë. Simultaneously, it made her disciplined and self-reflective and therefore enabled her literary development. However, it also brought her, as the further text will demonstrate, loneliness and depression.

## **10. Romanticizing Illness and Pain**

The following section investigates the link between Victorian femininity and the modes of illness and suffering. More specifically, it focuses on the presentation of pain and illness as inherent parts of Victorian femininity. Concerning this matter, Elisabeth Gaskell’s biography provides an example of how the Victorian era aestheticized and feminized pain and illness.

Margot Peters, the publisher of Charlotte Brontë's biography from 1986, defines the peculiar nature of the success of Brontë's story in the following way: "The Brontë glamour is the glamour of fame deified by suffering. They are canonized, these sisters, by tragedy of their lives" (xvi). This paper has been trying to link Brontë's misfortune, pain and illness with the patriarchal mind-set Charlotte Brontë grew up within. As it has been illustrated on previous pages, self-renunciation, abstinence from pleasure, homeboundness and submissiveness were characteristics of Victorian middle-class women. Additionally, pain, depressive state of mind, fragility as well as illness became female gender markers. Moreover, illness, similar to pain, was allotted a sense of attractiveness, mystery and finally, femininity. These qualities, so deeply embedded in the concept of Victorian femininity, served the maintenance of the prevalent patriarchal gender and social hierarchy. By presenting femininity as physically inferior, masculinity was legitimising its claims to political, economic and social power. In one of the main reference books of this paper, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, Gilbert and Gubar illustrate how patriarchal society and its repressive sociosexual differentiation make women both mentally and physically ill. The authors state that many diseases which affected women in the 19<sup>th</sup> century were induced by the oppressive patriarchal system, which imposed unhealthy constrictions and codes of behaviour on women. "To be trained in renunciation is almost necessarily to be trained to ill health, since the human animal's first and strongest urge is to his/her own survival, pleasure, assertion." (Gilbert and Gubar 54). Furthermore, Gilbert and Gubar emphasize that "the 19th century culture seems to have actually admonished women to be ill. In other words, the female diseases from which the Victorian women suffered were not always "by-products of their training in femininity. They were the goals of such training" (54). The patriarchy induced the sense of inferiority, self-doubt and inadequacy of femininity what inevitably led to the development of diverse psychosomatic illnesses.

From her early childhood onwards illness and suffering were pervasive elements in Charlotte Brontë's life. At a very young age Brontë lost her mother to an unknown illness, probably tuberculosis. Furthermore, she grew up taking care of her ill father, depressive alcohol-prone brother and extremely fragile sisters. Often in situations of death or severe illness, Charlotte Brontë had to step in as mother-substitute for her sisters and nurturer for her father. As Gaskell puts it, "Charlotte herself was outwardly the strongest of the family, and all domestic exertion fell upon her shoulders" (370). As a teenager she started to suffer intense headaches and depression, symptoms which also affected all of her sisters. "Think of her home and the black shadow of remorse lying over one in it, till his very brain was mazed, and till his gifts and his life were lost, think of her father's sight hanging on a thread, of her sisters delicate health and dependence on her care" (Gaskell 233), reminds Gaskell when describing Brontë's home. Hard work and anxieties often led to physical disturbances, such as shortness of breath, constriction of the chest, pneumonia, feeling of suffocating or stomach discomfort. Physical pain can be interpreted as a reaction to unfulfilled desires and repression that marked Brontë's life. With respect to this issue Brontë remarks:

That depression of spirits, which I thought was gone when I wrote last, came back again with a heavy recoil; internal congestion ensued, and then inflammation. I had severe pain in my right side, frequent burning and aching in my chest; sleep almost forsook me, or would never come, except accompanied by ghastly dreams; appetite vanished, and slow fever was my continual companion (Gaskell 376).

Melancholy, depression and, as this chapter shows, homesickness have an aesthetic value in Victorian literature. Gaskell modelled her protagonist as a nostalgic, depressive, melancholic, homebound, fragile artist. So well established was the cliché which connected

melancholy, body afflictions and creativity that many authors longed for their spleen, believing that it will enhance their creative inspiration. “Sadness made one interesting. It was a mark of refinement and sensibility, to be sad. (...) The melancholy character was a superior one: sensitive, creative and being apart” (Sontag 32). As depressive state of mind became a distinctive symbol of artists and authors, the concept of illness and fragility shaped the image of Victorian femininity. Charlotte Brontë embodies both phenomena: the artistic side of depression and fragile side of Victorian femininity. Her biography is based on the Victorian concept of fragile femininity; that is, femininity that is moulded by domestic duty, inevitable sufferings, repressed sexuality, body fragility and illness. The reader gets the impression, it was precisely the unity of pain, melancholy and selflessness which elevated Brontë above the limits of her gender, nurtured her talent and enabled her creative development. “The uniqueness of her pain is the guarantee of her creative vision”, claims d’Albertis (7). What d’Albertis tries to show is that Brontë’s pain is an essential part of her path to literary perfection. That is, her ascetic life, sexual repression and the experience of pain empowered her and ensured her free creative development.

Besides depression and melancholy, chronic homesickness takes up an important place in the formation of the Brontë’s female identity. It is manifested in panic and anxiety attacks accompanied by breathing and digestion difficulties, which regularly occurred after leaving the security of the parsonage. This issue is more prominent in the case of Anne and Emily Brontë, where homesickness quickly evolves into a more physical illness, which eventually brings the sisters to their ends: “Every morning when Emily woke, the vision of home and moors rushed on her, and darkened and saddened the day that lay before her. (...) In this struggle her health was quickly broken. (...) I felt in my heart that she would die, if she did not go home, and this conviction obtained her recall” (Gaskell 104). Accustomed and trained



to reticence, the sisters fear the unfamiliar environments, other landscapes, other homes and cities. As Gilbert and Gubar highlight, “it seemed inevitable that women reared for, and conditioned to, lives of privacy, reticence, domesticity, might develop pathological fears of public places and unconfined spaces” (54). In studying the life of Charlotte Brontë, Elisabeth Gaskell recognised the destructive power of homesickness. Yet, the biographer doesn’t further analyse it, but leaves it classified a common Victorian women’s malady connected with physical feebleness, unsocial habits and homeboundness. From this paper’s perspective homesickness could, however, be a result of spatial confinement and gradually internalized, imposed domestication. What was considered distinctively female disease of agoraphobia, is closely associated with this architectural imprisonment within patriarchal institutions which define women’s roles and duties. The agoraphobic behaviour, as Gilbert and Gubar explain, was initially installed into women by patriarchal education to maintain dominant gender hierarchies and gradually evolved into an integral part of the Victorian female cultural identity.

## **11. Conclusion**

As the first biographer of Charlotte Brontë’s life, Elisabeth Gaskell had a very difficult and delicate task to perform. She had to demystify but simultaneously mythologise a very controversial Victorian author. The biographer set off with an assignment to provide a coherent story of Charlotte Brontë’s life for the Victorian audience, to justify her colleague’s outrageous life path and to establish a new female literary role-model. Through accumulation of letters, interviews and observations, Gaskell re-created the chronology of Charlotte’s life as well as her cultural and social background. Ms. Brontë was no longer a mere abstraction to the reader’s mind. The reader became acquainted with her as a woman and as a writer. It is

precisely this division of personality into two seemingly contrasting parts, womanhood and authorship, which underpins this paper.

Firstly, this thesis' focus has been set on the conditions underlying the production of the respective biography. It has been demonstrated that *The Life* drew upon Gaskell's own experience as novelist. Within this framework, it has been shown how the biographer intervened at several stages to optimize the posthumous Brontë's image. By reconstructing Brontë as literary model based on creativeness, submissiveness and feminine duty, Gaskell tried to soothe the riot raised against Brontë's alleged coarseness and breach of literary norms. Further analysis of the biography has displayed that Gaskell's Charlotte Brontë can be studied as a literary protagonist, an imaginative creation with a life of its own. In the course of the study, it became noticeable that the biography's narrative plot was informed by the patriarchal ideology of the Victorian period. Gaskell subjugated the life of her heroine to the approved norms of familial duty. Herewith this biography, filled with gender and class details, provides sufficient material for the study of social barriers within the Victorian literary market. Events from Brontë's life account for the position of women writers in the Victorian culture, where creativity was defined purely in male terms, where women attempting the pen had to fight a gender-conflict and eventually underwent the socially prescribed subordination. The lure and complexity of Brontë's figure lie in the author's attempt to simultaneously subvert and conform to patriarchal norms. Out of this experiment Charlotte Brontë emerges as a literary visionary who asserted herself on a male-dominated market and still managed to maintain her femininity. Furthermore, a close reading of the biography has shown that Victorian femininity was defined in terms of fragility, self-sacrifice, domesticity and timidity, whereas masculinity presupposed qualities such as strength, creativity and assertiveness. What makes Charlotte

Brontë so unique is the harmonisation and fusion of these, socially constructed, male and female qualities.

This paper also took the task of deconstructing the literary fusion of shy femininity and masculine authorship. To grasp the complexity of this harmonisation, a critical eye was directed towards the biography's presentation of the features of a Victorian woman writer, her class, sexuality, domesticity, illness, duty awareness. It has been exemplified how women took up male pseudonyms to avoid devaluation of their work. Women writers also modified their literary expression not to be associated with triviality of what had been known as female literature. In the further steps, the paper analysed the distinctive components of personality standing behind Charlotte Brontë and her male pseudonym Currer Bell. Self-assured professional Currer Bell explored the limits of the society and market. This more "masculine" part of Ms. Brontë was complemented by an introvert, dutiful, self-sacrificing, domesticated Charlotte. As it has been highlighted in the course of this thesis, a major part of Charlotte Brontë's creative success was based on self-discipline and sexual repression. Under the signature of Currer Bell Charlotte Brontë could unleash her fictional characters and let them swim in the sea of passion; however, privately she continuously repressed and relinquished her own sexuality and desire. The self-destructive impulses of Charlotte Brontë's desire are strategically used to foster the authors' literary inspiration. Brontë's self-restraint and repression appear as a medium of attaining and maintaining literary creativity. Her selflessness and asceticism empower her against the conditions of her modest social background, lack of physical beauty and prestige. More, self-suppression and self-sacrifice were meant to soothe her anxiety of authorship, her guilt of entering the forbidden garden of literature. It has also been argued that Elisabeth Gaskell, as the writer of this biography, perceived emotional and sexual repression as a necessary method to remove her subject from

the influence of triviality of “female” writing manners. Only in the condition of emotional isolation could the purity and objectivity of Brontë’s writing style be preserved. Finally, the study of Charlotte Brontë reveals another strategic point in the construction of Victorian femininity. Illness and pain emerge as the markers of Brontë’s femaleness. Depression, melancholy, anxiety and homesickness, induced by multiple burdens of femininity, add a final touch to the image of the talented but subservient, fragile and self-sacrificing author. This complex charm of her character is rooted in the relationship between the author’s self-reflexive desire that flew into her literature, the combativeness of desire that formed her femininity and assertive ambition which enabled her market dominance. In combining the parts of conventionalized middle-class male and female social roles of the 19th century with creativeness, observant realism, and smouldering emancipation Brontë manages to position herself as a woman writer on the male-favoured market. The seemingly contradictory mix of virtues is what enabled Gaskell’s Brontë to step out of the constraints of the 19th century class and gender conservatism and establish herself as literary heroine.

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